



# *February Newsletter*

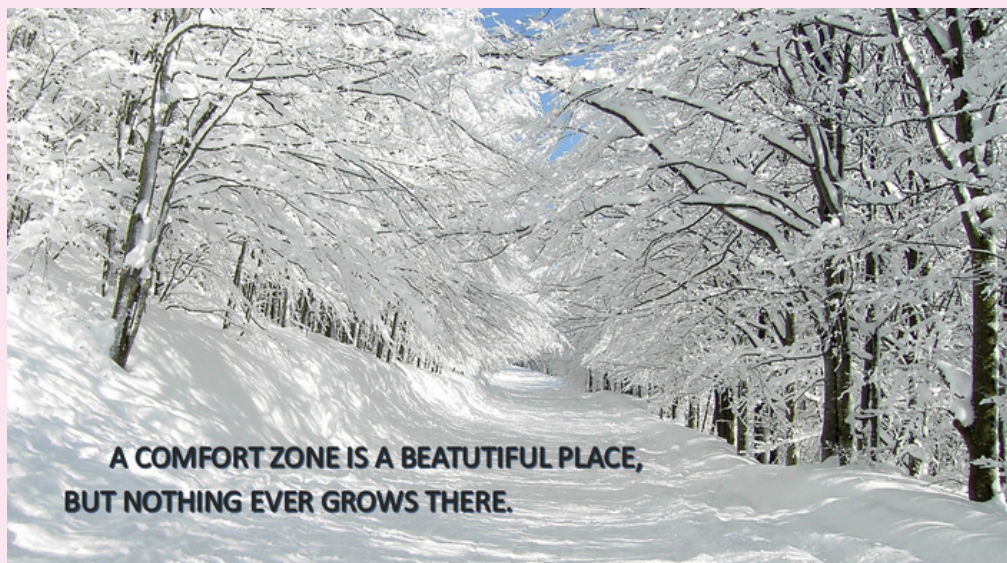
New Milford Youth Agency



# NMYA Directors Message

Jason O'Connor, LMSW

The winter chill still maintains a strong grip on us in the month of February. Many days we find ourselves stepping out our doors and wishing we could head back inside and hibernate like bears! The cold and wind do its best to reinforce this isolation and to limit our opportunities to get out and explore. This feeling of closure and limitation not only pertains to our physical bodies, but can be felt in our mental wellbeing. The winter and its cold tempt us to put-off our early goals for the year and it adds additional limitations for us to grow. It is easy here to do nothing, but this stagnation or lack of growth has its consequences. Remember to show yourself and others patience and grace, and to understand that sometimes growth can move slow or not even at all. The important reminder, is to keep moving and to stay positive. Growth and change comes with time, so be patient with yourself if deadlines are off schedule or goals still unaccomplished. This is also another opportunity for us to be resilient and again, to keep moving forward. If it's snowing, put your boots and coat on. If it's cold, wear mittens and a wool hat. Adapt and overcome, but keep going. Take time and appreciate the difference in the seasons and the beauty of winter. Spring is around the corner, but let us stay present and pay attention to the here and now. Focus on what needs to be done and what we can accomplish now.



# Enrichment Program- Vincent Vanwattam

We have a "DIY workshop with mommy's board silly" on March 16th- Cost \$25. register at [myyouthagency.com](http://myyouthagency.com). Videos are coming out for cooking in March as well as TikToks on conservation.

## TIPS FOR PARENTS OF LGBTQIA+ YOUTH :

Sara Wells, LMSW

ALL parents want what's best for their kids. But providing support isn't always easy — especially if you are the parent of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQIA+) child. In many ways no different from their peers, LGBTQIA+ youth face some unique challenges that parents often feel unprepared to tackle. Here are steps you can take to keep your kid happy and healthy.

### **Let them know they are loved**

For many LGBTQ youths, breaking the news to mom and dad is the scariest part of coming out. Time and time again, we hear the same things from kids, 'Once my parents are behind me, I can handle anything else the world throws at me. You're their anchor, and your acceptance is key. Research shows that LGBTQIA+ adolescents who are supported by their families grow up to be happier and healthier adults.

You don't need to be an expert in all things LGBTQIA+ to let them know you care. There's no right or wrong way to express love, just be present and be open. Even if you're not sure what to say, something as simple as, "I'm here for you. I love you, and I will support you no matter what" can mean the world to your child.

### **Encourage dialogue**

As you're likely well aware, getting your kids to open up can feel impossible. The best way to do this is to build trust and start small. Be curious about their life. Get to know their friends and what they like to do. Ask them how their day went and if they learned anything interesting in school. If it's like pulling teeth at times, don't be discouraged. Children really do want to be able to talk to parents about what's going on in their lives.

These conversations may seem like no-brainers, but staying connected to your child's world makes it easier for them to approach you with bigger, more complex issues, like sexuality. The more you communicate with your child, the more comfortable they'll feel.

### **How to Get Them Talking**

You can't always rely on your children to initiate these exchanges, though. When you feel something needs to be discussed, try being less direct. Adolescents often have a hard time talking about themselves. Instead, bring up their friends or characters you encounter while watching age-appropriate movies or television together.

Today's media provide plenty of teachable moments for parents to seize. While it may seem less personal, it is an opportunity to broach sensitive topics in a way that's not so scary. For instance, if a movie has a bisexual character, spark a conversation by saying, "The character in this show is attracted to boys and girls. That's OK with me. What do you think?"

### **Learn the facts**

There are a lot of misconceptions about gender and sexual orientation. It's not "just a phase." Embrace — don't dismiss — their evolving sense of self. There is no "cure." It's not something that needs to be fixed. Don't look for blame. Instead, celebrate your child and all that they are.

### **Stay involved with the school**

Kids spend almost as much time in the classroom as they do at home. Here's what you can do to make sure they feel comfortable there, too.

Advocate for a gay-straight alliance (GSA), which has been shown to make schools safer and boost academic performance among LGBTQIA+ students.

## Continued...

- Maintain frequent contact with teachers. That way, you'll know when issues arise.
- Push for more inclusive sex education. Very few states allow schools to provide LGBTQIA+ students with the information they need to be safe and healthy. Be aware of these knowledge gaps so that you can fill them yourself.
- Above all, don't hesitate to speak up. Parents forget that they have a huge voice in the school system. You do have power. If there's a problem and the school isn't taking your concerns seriously, go to the principal or even the school board.

### Look out for signs of bullying

Bullying is a problem for many students, but LGBTQIA+ youth in particular are often targeted for being different. If you see these signs, reach out to a teacher, guidance counselor or school administrator:

- Behavior change (e.g., your outgoing, sociable child is now withdrawn)
- Discipline or behavioral problems in school
- Declining grades
- Unexplained absences
- Sudden shifts in who's a friend and who's not
- Engagement in risk behavior (e.g., drug use, new sexual partner) that is out of character for your child

### Take a team approach

Providing support can be challenging at times. It's OK to be stressed, confused or surprised — but don't pull back when you're needed most. Some parents feel so overwhelmed that they just throw up their hands and say, 'I can't do it.' It's a lot for parents to process, but don't leave your kid in the lurch.

Remember, your child is having more difficulty with this than you are and your duty as a parent comes first. If you're struggling, reach out for help. Team up with a pediatrician, a counselor at school, close family members and even community organizations, if you're having trouble going it alone.

### Ensure they form healthy relationships

As kids become teens, it's OK for them to develop interest in other boys and girls their age. Dating is daunting for most parents — especially parents of LGBTQIA+ youth — but it's an important part of adolescent development for all children. To keep them safe, be involved and stay connected. By encouraging your kid to date in a way that's healthy and age-appropriate, you send a powerful message: LGBTQIA+ relationships are normal, and there's nothing to hide or be ashamed of.

### Stay on top of social media

Because they're often discouraged from being open about their sexual orientation and gender identity, some LGBTQIA+ individuals rely on social media and phone applications to meet others. Many social platforms and apps provide LGBTQIA+ youth an inclusive space to connect with friends and allies, but some (especially dating apps) include content that is inappropriate for teens. Monitor what they're doing on their devices and talk to them about phone and social media use.

More importantly, understand that kids turn to these apps if they feel like they don't have anyone to talk to. Be available so that your child doesn't need to look elsewhere for guidance and support.



Stacey Kabasakalian- Youth Intervention Manager



**High School Students, Save the Date!**  
**New Milford High School 2022**  
**Health and Wellness Fair**  
**Coming Soon May 2022**

New Milford High School students, join us, outside the school cafeteria for this one-day event, brought to you by community members who care about your health and wellness! Health Teacher, Mrs. Schlicher, and I are excited to welcome guests who will share safety information, practical health tips, mental health resources, physical fitness options, and much more! If you know of a professional in physical and mental health that may want to join us, please share my contact information!

We look forward to being together, IN PERSON!  
Stacey Kabasakalian, [skabasakalian@newmilford.org](mailto:skabasakalian@newmilford.org)



# Student of the Month-Dylan Heydet

It is an honor to recognize Dylan for the dedication and excellent work ethic he demonstrates to Video Crew.

Although Dylan is now an adult, he began here when he was a senior in high school as part of our Video Crew.

Dylan has been the glue to our program for a year. He solves technology issues, works with the crew to plan projects, and has valuable input on topics for programming.

Dylan's skills to edit and produce quality videos and podcasts have helped us improve our program and elevate the quality of our productions. He does this with kindness, patience, and professionalism.

Some of his projects include Black History Exhibition with the Historical Society, childcare spotlights, Gambling Project video, several Public Service Announcements, and more.

The Youth Agency is fortunate to have Dylan as part of our crew!

